

Introduction

At the March 2001 Personnel Leaders Meeting, Army Chief of Staff GEN Eric K. Shinseki described his vision of Army transformation for the assembled senior leaders. At the conclusion of the address, Shinseki was asked what three things he needed most from the personnel community to support Army transformation. It was an excellent question at the time—one for which there was no real answer, but also one that should be used today to frame some important dynamics of change.

Change Philosophies

Many of us have read or heard the philosophies of Jack Welch, former CEO of General Electric Co. for 20 years. In his book *Jack: Straight from the Gut*, he states, “I’ve always believed that when the rate of change inside an institution becomes slower than the rate of change outside, the end is in sight.” Shinseki has also said to many Army audiences, “If you don’t like change, you’ll like irrelevance even less.”

It is intuitive that transformation involves change, but why do so many want to get credit for transforming without substantially changing? Why is change so hard? In 1513 A.D., political philosopher Machiavelli is believed to have said, “Nothing is more difficult than to introduce a new order because the innovator has, for enemies, all those who have done well under the old conditions and lukewarm defenders in those who may do well under the new.”

We can describe many military reactions to change as almost schizophrenic in nature. On the one hand, we can honestly boast that we have changed tremendously throughout our history. You often hear, “Of course we can change; we change all the time; just tell us what you want us to change and we’ll do it!” Author Peter Senge says in his book *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, “In a traditional hierarchical organization, . . . all folks needed was [sic] their ‘marching orders.’” On the other hand, we are often quite defensive about change. You hear words to the effect, “Change?

PERSONNEL TRANSFORMATION: THE DYNAMICS OF CHANGE

COL Ruth B. Collins

Why change? Change to what? Why change when we aren’t sure what the Objective Force will look like or require?”

One reason we’ve become so defensive about change is that it’s normally associated with more work and fewer resources. Many senior leaders invoke change but rarely identify for us what we can stop doing when we incorporate the new good idea. Isn’t it true that change is more readily accepted when you can see clearly that work is eliminated, improved, or at least adequately resourced? Transformation is as much about what not to do as what to do. You’ve heard it said, “To change and to change for the better are two different things.” Change needs to ultimately improve the organization, not just make it different.

Leading Change

At the Army War College (AWC), where we educate future senior leaders, we address change management as an important strategic leader competency for the future. Change is as integral to future strategic leadership as is any other single operational or conceptual theme. Yet, we see the same reluctance to change here as elsewhere in the Army. Not surprising, you say, because future senior leaders are simply a product of the environment and culture in which they have thrived. Their separate branches or functional areas emphasize, more or less, the institutional doctrinal and conceptual foundations upon which

their contributions to the overall Army are based. A recent speaker at the AWC described much of the resistance to change in our military Services as the result of building communities with “tribal representatives operating tribal machines that can only be interpreted by tribal representatives.”

In the personnel community (and correspondingly in other support communities), should there be resistance to change when we can see so clearly that we are not delivering full-spectrum support to our full-spectrum force? We ask ourselves, “Why haven’t we had more innovation in our past? Why do we find ourselves in 2002 with outdated processes and systems and questions about relevance?” No need to dwell on them, but we should use lessons learned in tackling the critical transformation facing us today.

It seems we’ve previously left “change management” to a relatively small group of people in our community and have been entirely too cautious about technology and innovation. We weren’t able to integrate the entire personnel community with processes and systems that worked top to bottom and back again. There are lots of reasons for this—inadequate resources, decentralized approach, etc. We all know the horrific results: hundreds of stand-alone and unintegrated systems with unintended consequences; unreconcilable manning statistics and sources; and systems that poorly support mobilization, deployments, or integration of our vital Reserve components. To our

community's credit, we have put all that ugliness upfront in our personnel transformation campaign and are concentrating on resourcing a vital, achievable, future vision.

Change Dynamics

How do change dynamics of our personnel transformation link to those of Army transformation? This leads to what I believe are good responses to the question asked of Shinseki last year, "What three things do you need most from the personnel community in support of Army transformation?"

- *Be a committed leader of change yourself.* Take a leading role in producing and managing the desired effects of Army and personnel transformation and help communicate the strategies to the rest of the organization. Don't personally take on all the issues, but co-opt and solicit enthusiastic support from those around you. Be guilty of neither nearsightedness nor farsightedness in establishing the immediate and long-term requirements for your part of the personnel community. Don't wander without focus or watch others do the same. Peter Senge, again in his book *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, reminds us, "Without a pull toward some goal which people truly want to achieve, the forces in support of the status quo can be overwhelming."

- *Go after the latest technology with a passion.* Realize that commercial products offer many solutions in systems, processes, and practices. The selection of PeopleSoft 8 for the Defense Integrated Military Human Resources System is a great start, but we can't sit back and wait 2 to 4 years for that small group of others to plop solutions in front of us without making an investment between now and then. Find technology and process solutions for what you do every day, and enable the bright, technically advanced soldiers, warrant officers, civilians, and contractors to do the same. Transformation is in the ingenuity of our young folks. They are computer savvy and can handle the simultaneous audio, visual, and sensory inputs that many of us cannot.

Guide our young folks; empower and resource them to the greatest extent possible, every day. Fight for implementation of their solutions because you know how truly critical they are to providing battlefield and institutional support to our fighting men and women.

- *Be a confidence agent for soldiers through the change period.* We must anticipate increased anxiety within the force as a result of transformation unknowns. Because of our responsibility to support our soldiers, we have the unique challenge of not only managing our own change, but helping others understand and find confidence in the bigger Army. We are "keepers of the keys" to lifeblood systems that result in pay, reassignments, promotions, services, and the full range of Army programs that touch soldiers, veterans, retirees, families, and others where it counts. They will look to us through the change period for assurances that the Army will still take care of them and their families. Our signals will directly impact manning and retention.

Change Resistance

It's important that we ask ourselves, "Do we now have enough of the right folks at all levels working and 'owning' personnel transformation?" Also, are we perpetuating that the tragic, untimely loss of former Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel LTG Tim Maude on September 11, 2001, is the effective end of our masterful change opportunity? I hope not, but we should face what might be causing us to hold back from supporting needed changes. Like many of you, I linger on the personnel lost and the opportunities lost when the former DCSPER and his office were hit. But I also know that LTG Maude and all those lost would expect each of us to aggressively fuel their envisioned changes, which the new Army Deputy Chief of Staff, G-1, is so capably leading today.

One last aspect about change resistance, one that runs head-on with what's valued in our culture: When you change from something popular to something unpopular, even when you sense it to be the right thing, it is a significant dynamic. Changing from

something unpopular to something popular is always easier. For us military personnelists, who for these past 8 years tasted the fruits of our command-centric culture, it is extremely difficult to see the uncertain future. This is a dynamic for all organizations, causing emotions to run high and change barriers to be formidable. We should not take this lightly, but continue to explore the future environment and the transformed place in our Army that values excellence in operational, yet functional areas.

Conclusion

Change cannot occur without willing and committed followers. All of us are both leaders and followers in every aspect of personnel transformation. We must set the conditions and resource "strategies within strategies" to make this complex change occur effectively for the good of our community, and more importantly, for our Army. Personnel transformation, like Army transformation, is not a "be all, end all" plan. We have alternatives, vulnerabilities, challenges, and interim successes and failures. By understanding and focusing on the dynamics of change, we can, as the professional and capable team that we are, better execute personnel transformation.

COL RUTH B. COLLINS is a Faculty Member at the U.S. Army War College in the Department of Command, Leadership, and Management. She is a subject matter expert on manning the force and teaches courses on military personnel management and strategic leadership. She is an Adjutant General Corps Officer with 28 years service in a wide range of operational assignments. Her undergraduate degree is from the University of Kentucky, and she has an M.A. in human resources management from Pepperdine University.
